Aristotle and Aquinas

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Aristotle as Metaphysician

- Plato's greatest student was Aristotle (384-322 BC).

- In metaphysics, Aristotle rejected Plato's theory of forms.

- Most importantly, he rejected Plato's claim that forms are distinct from the things that "share" in them.

- As a result, Aristotle gave natural science a central role in his philosophy and linked his metaphysics closely to the investigation of nature.

- In this segment, we will investigate excerpts from two of Aristotle's works:

    - *Metaphysics* (metaphysics)
    - *Physics* (natural science)

- Later, we will see how Aristotle's philosophy was adapted for Christianity by Thomas Aquinas.

Plato's Account of Kinds

- Plato's general account of how a thing is of a kind:

Form
causes
Quality   *in*   Thing

- An example of how a thing (some wine in a goblet) is of a kind (cold):

Coldness itself
causes
The wine's coldness   *in*   The wine

Criticisms of Plato

- We saw in the last set of slides that Aristotle criticized Plato's theory of forms in three basic ways.

    - There would be forms for things which should not have forms, such as negations and relatives.

    - It is redundant to introduce separately existing forms if things have qualities that allow them to be sorted into kinds.

    - The forms do not suffice to account for change in the natural world.

- We will now discuss Aristotle's remedies for these problems.

Accident and Essence

- Plato used the word 'form' (Greek: *eidos*) to describe what makes a thing the kind of thing that it is.

- Aristotle agreed with this usage, but he disagreed with the way in which it is applied to things.

- Only some of what can be said about a thing describe the kind of thing it is.

- Consider two cases:

    - Socrates is pale (i.e., has pale skin).
    - Socrates is human.

- The first case involves a quality that Socrates might or might not have (as he could spend more time in the sun).

- The second case involves a quality that Socrates must have if he is to be Socrates.

Accidents

- A quality that a thing might or might not have is called an "accident" or "incidental" of the thing.

- In his book *Categories*, Aristotle described nine different sorts of accidents (with examples in parentheses).

    - Quality, in a narrow sense (white),
    - Quantity (two feet long),
    - Relative (larger),
    - Where (in the Lyceum),

- When (yesterday),
  - Being in a position (sitting),
  - Having (has shoes on),
  - Acting on (cutting),
  - Being acted on (being cut).

Essences

- In contrast to accidents, the essence of a thing or subject is "what that subject is."
- The essence of a thing can be given in a definition.
  - Socrates is (in essence) human.
  - To be human is to be a rational animal.

Species

- The essence of Socrates is to be human, and humanity is called the "species" to which he belongs.
- The accident, Socrates's being pale, also belongs to a species, paleness, and so on with the other accidents.
- In one sense, for Aristotle, the form is identified with the species.
  - The form of Socrates is to be human.
  - The form of Socrates's being pale is paleness.
- Thus far, the view of Aristotle appears to be the same as that of Plato.
- For example, a "relative," such as being taller than, has a species, and hence a form.

Limiting the Range of Forms

- Not all grouping of things into kinds, however, call for forms.
- The species are restricted to what is essential and what is accidental.
- Both essence and accident are described positively, as what something is.
- So if form is species, negations (Socrates is not dark) would lack a form.
- More generally, the range of forms is constrained by the account of what can be an essence or an accident.
- For example, "pale human" is not an essence, nor is it an accident of anything.

Immanence

- For Aristotle, the essence of a thing is "in" the thing rather than existing separately, as Plato held.

- What is "in" a thing can be said to be "immanent."

- The restiction of the forms to what is immanent answers the criticism that separately existing forms are redundant.

- Thus, being rational and being human are in Socrates as well as in all other human beings.

- Plato might respond by asking how the essences and accidents can be shared by many things unless there is a "one over many" that accounts for the sameness of essence in the things.

- Put in another way, if a form is a species, how could the species be shared by many objects unless it were itself a separate object?

Do Forms Have Causal Powers?

- Aristotle might reply that the forms must be "in" the things, because if they were not, they could not be causes.

- A cause, for Aristotle, is what answers the question "why" a thing is as it is.

- For example, one form of change is change of the accident "being in a position."

- We call this change "motion."

- The evidence of the senses is that the motion of one thing is caused by the motion of another thing.

- Object A has the accident "acting on" object B, and this action is the source of B's movement.

- Then it is not the form or species, "acting on," but rather A's action itself, that causes B to be acted upon.

Forms as Causes

- In fact, Aristotle allowed that forms can be understood as causes.

- Form is one of four distinct kinds of causes.

- The "formal cause" applies to "things that do not involve motion."

- Consider, for example the causes of forms themselves.

    - The species human being is defined as rational animal.
    - The genus "animal" is part of this definition and could be said to be a cause of the species "human being."

- Other "formal causes" can be found in the realm of numbers.

    - The relation of 2 : 1 is the cause of the octave.

- In a concrete thing, the whole (e.g., a table) is the cause of its parts (e.g., its legs and top).

Matter as Cause

- The relation of the table to the wood suggests a second kind of cause.

- "That out of which a thing comes to be and which persists" is considered a kind of cause of the thing.

    - The wood of which a table is composed is its material cause.

- Like the formal cause, the material cause is not dynamic, in the sense that it is not an account of how a thing changes.

The Agent as Cause

- What forms fail to be able to account for is the initiation of change.

- One way to answer the question "why did this change come about?" is by citing the agent that brought it about.

    - The wood-worker is the agent who created the table (from its material cause, the wood).

- Change of motion is perhaps the most important kind of change that is explained by the agent.

    - Starting and stopping,
    - Speeding up and slowing down,
    - Re-directing.

The End as Cause

- The fourth kind of cause identified by Aristotle is the end for which an object exists.

  – The end of the construction of the table is to provide a stable, expansive, level surface for conducting various activities.

- Stating the end is a way of explaining "why" a thing is as it is.

Teleology and Necessity

- Aristotle claims that nature acts for a purpose, rather than from blind necessity.

- If nature did not act for a purpose, its ends would be brought about by chance.

  – The specialized functions of the parts of animals would be the products of chance.

- But to be brought about by chance is to be unusual, which the products of nature are not.

- Nature works *teleologically*, as do crafts: there is an end (*telos*) which nature has the means to bring about.

In Defense of Teleology

- Apparent irregularities in nature can be explained as the result of failure to achieve the end, rather than by chance.

- Moving toward an end does not require deliberation, so nature does not need to deliberate in order to achieve its ends.

  – The causes that are needed for the production of a thing need only be material.

- Necessity is found in the end, rather than in the antecedent conditions that produce something.

Terminal Causes

- Aristotle argued that in any series of causes, there must be a terminal cause which is not itself caused.

- There then must be:

- A form which defines other forms but which cannot itself be defined.
- A material from which all things are composed, but which is not composed of anything else.
- An agent which is responsible for all motion but which is not itself moved (an "unmoved mover").
- An end toward which all things change, but which has no end for itself.

- The unmoved mover must be eternal and generally unchangeable as well as not being moveable.

The Regress Argument

- The argument for terminal causes proceeds by *reductio ad absurdum*.

  1. Suppose that there is no terminal cause of a series of causes.
  2. Then each cause itself has a cause.
  3. Then there would be an infinite series of causes.
  4. An infinite series of causes is impossible.
  5. Therefore, there is a terminal cause.

- This kind of regress argument can be used to support the thesis that God exists.

Theology

- According to Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), *Theology* is the study of God:

  - Whether God exists,
  - What God's attributes are,
  - How God is related to created things.

- There are two ways in which theology might be conducted:

  - Through the authority of divine revelation,
  - Through the use of natural reason.

- If one rejects divine revelation, then articles of faith cannot be used as first principles of theology.

- So natural reason is useful in theology.

The Five Ways

- Aquinas presented five arguments from natural effects to the existence of a divine cause.

- These arguments are known as the "five ways" of proving God's existence.

- The model for these arguments is found in the metaphysics of Aristotle.

The Argument from Motion

- This argument is described as "the first and more manifest way."

1. Some things in the world are in motion. [Evident to our senses]

2. If a thing is in motion, its potential to move is made actual by something that is actual.

3. Nothing's potential to do x can be made actual by the thing's actually doing x.

4. So, any motion of a thing is made actual by something other than that thing. [1, 2, 3]

5. If the motion of everything is made actual by something itself actually moving, then there is an infinite chain of movers.

6. There is no infinite chain of movers.

7. So, not all motion is made actual by something actually moving. [5, 6]

8. So, there is an actual mover that is not actually moving. [7]

9. An actual mover that is not actually moving is God.

10. So, God exists. [8,9]

The Argument from Causality

- The basic idea of the argument from causality is that there must be a first efficient cause:

    - An efficient cause is an agent that brings about a change in something else.

1. Nothing can be prior to itself.

2. An efficient cause in nature is prior to its effect.

3. So, no efficient cause in nature is the effect of itself. [1,2]

4. For any effect x in nature, x has an efficient cause.

5. So, for any effect x in nature, there is an efficient cause y that is distinct from x. [3,4]

6. If there is no efficient cause that is not an effect, then there is an infinite chain of efficient causes. [5]

7. There is no infinite chain of efficient causes.

8. So, there is an efficient cause of an effect in nature that is not itself an effect. [6,7]

9. An efficient cause that is not an effect is God.

10. So, God exists. [8,9]

The Argument from Contingency

1. What is contingent might or might not exist at any time.

2. Suppose everything is contingent.

3. Then it is possible for nothing to exist at all at a time. [1,2]

4. Nothing can come to exist from nothing.

5. So, it is possible that nothing ever exists. [3,4]

6. The possibility of nothing ever existing is absurd.

7. So, not everything is contingent, and something is necessary (existing at all times). [2-6]

8. There cannot be an infinite chain of causality by necessary things.

9. So, there is a being that is necessary in itself and the cause of all necessity. [7,8]

10. Such a being is God.

11. So, God exists.[9,10]

The Argument from Gradation

1. Some beings have a higher grade of perfection (of goodness, truth, nobility) than others.

2. The degree of perfection of a thing is always measured against a being with a maximum of perfection (the good is measured against the best, etc.).

3. So, for each perfection, there is a being with a maximum of that perfection. [1,2]

4. The being with the maximum of a given perfection is the cause of that perfection.

5. So, for each perfection, there is a being which is the cause of that perfection. [3,4]

6. The cause of all perfections must be found in a single being.

7. So, there is a being which is the cause of all perfections in all beings. [5,6]

8. A being which is the cause of all perfections of all beings is God.

9. So, God exists. [7, 8]

The Argument from Governance

1. Natural bodies act so as to obtain the best results. [Aristotle]

2. Acting so as to obtain the best results is acting on the basis of knowledge of the end. [*Contra* Aristotle]

3. So, natural bodies act on the basis of knowledge. [1,2]

4. Many natural bodies act on the basis of knowledge without having knowledge. [3, observation]

5. If a natural body acts on the basis of knowledge without having knowledge, then it is directed by a being that has such knowledge.

6. So, many natural bodies are directed by a being that has knowledge of their ends. [4,5]

7. A being who directs all natural bodies toward their ends is God.

8. So, many natural bodies are directed toward their ends by God. [6,7]

9. So, God exists. [8]

Limitations of the Arguments

- The arguments from natural effect to divine cause have an inherent limitation.

- The effects are finite, while God is infinite.

- So the role of God as cause in each of the arguments does not yield perfect knowledge of God's essence.

- Together, the five arguments (if successful) only establish the existence of beings with the following features:

- Being a mover that is not moved,

- Being a cause that is not an effect,

- Being unable not to exist,

- Possessing a maximum of goodness and all perfections,

- Being director of all natural things.

- Hume in the eighteenth century exposed a limitation of the arguments not acknowledged by Aquinas.

  - A unitary God *would* explain all the effects, but several different beings as causes *could* explain them.

The Argument from Evil

- One of the chief problems with the notion of a perfectly good and powerful God is how evil can exist.

- Aquinas formulates the problem in this way:

  1. If God exists, then goodness is infinite, and there is no evil in the world.
  2. There is evil in the world.
  3. So, God does not exist. [1,2]

- One response, given by followers of Plato, is to deny the second premise.

  - Evil has no being, but instead is a "privation" or lack of being.

- Aquinas allows that the second premise is true, so he denies the truth of the first premise.

- Aquinas claims that God allows evil in order to produce the good.

  - This strategy in philosophy is called "compatibilism."
  - In this case, the existence of God and of evil are claimed to be compatible with each other.